

GULF OF MEXICO SHELLFISH REGISTER

Needs and opportunities identified by Gulf States in Water Quality White Paper:

- ◆ “Bacterial contamination of streams, bayous, beaches, and shellfish growing areas results in the temporary and sometimes permanent closure of shellfish beds to harvesting for human consumption...”
- ◆ “A better understanding of potential water quality effects of land use planning efforts is needed to protect existing shellfish resources and reduce potential effects on human health associated with water-based activities.”
- ◆ “Collaboration and assistance in biological assessment tool development, including identification of indicator organisms. Pooling resources and expertise from EPA, NOAA, and other Gulf states could significantly ‘jump-start’ this effort.”
- ◆ “Coordination among Federal and State partners in the collection of data to prevent duplication of effort and promote standardization and comparability of methods and data. This should include compilation of data into a Gulf of Mexico database, with web access to increase data and information sharing and facilitate the generation of reports by Federal and State entities.”

Federal Response: The Federal Workgroup proposes to coordinate a Gulf of Mexico Shellfish Register to provide background information for a Regional Assessment of the scale and scope of shellfish water closures and problems contributing to the closures. The Register would provide a basis for making region-wide decisions on where to focus management resources and would outline the needs for a regional shellfish water quality backbone.

The Gulf of Mexico Shellfish Register would be based on the current Shellfish Information Management System, developed by NOAA’s Center for Coastal Environment Health and BioMolecular Research along with other state and Federal partners, which currently:

- ◆ Provides a system to input and update shellfish growing area monitoring and classification information;
- ◆ Aids the states in producing growing area classification maps; and
- ◆ Establishes links to complementary coastal information nationwide that are useful to state, Federal and industry users.

However, unlike the current system, data collection for the Shellfish Register would incorporate information provided by the states on sources of pollution in classified waters and potential for restoration of shellfish beds. This effort would also include the development of a Shellfish Geographic Information System to display the most up-to-date boundaries of the classified shellfish growing waters. NOAA and its Federal partners would work with the states to gather information and ensure its standardization for input into the Register.

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Federal Workgroup Co-leads: NOAA, EPA

Other partners: FDA, USDA, DOI

G U L F W A T E R Q U A L I T Y

This Federal Response Proposal represents an initial project idea from the 13 agencies represented on the Federal Workgroup, in response to the Gulf State Alliance white papers; it is meant to stimulate discussion, among the Gulf State Alliance and the Federal Workgroup, as they work toward the development of a draft Gulf Plan of Action. Implementation of this project idea is subject to further evaluation and the availability of funding.